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A CONTINUING DIALOGUE
Mobilizing Community Power to Address Structural Racism





A Continuing Dialogue

Mobilizing Community Power to Address Structural Racism

by Lori Villarosa

Community organizing, civic participation and racial justice work have all evolved significantly in recent years as faster and more widespread changes have occurred in all realms of our society. While the changes may be well known and understood within their own spheres, like so much of the nonprofit and funding worlds, even when there is clear reason for overlap, we often find ourselves in completely separate rooms and conversations. The challenge is to craft strategies to integrate these efforts so that a racial justice lens and focus on structural change can gain traction throughout our social justice movements.

Within community organizing, new alliances and growing numbers of leaders of color with national influence have emerged along with stronger multiracial coalitions and increased participation of immigrant groups. Several

justice work and helped to support needed infrastructure in ways that are having an impact more broadly. So we are seeing some positive changes such as more policy think/action tanks led by people of color using a structural racism analysis, recognizing the mutual value of partnering with communities to strengthen policy framing.

And yet in spite of many lessons being learned and new promising practices, we know there are continued struggles—because the work is incredibly challenging and complex, because financial resources are still too limited, and because of the nature of structural transformation itself. Moreover, institutions themselves are inherently conservative and resistant to change, with ingrained capacities to adapt while reinforcing their existing patterns of organization and belief. As a result, most interventions on a structure will

Over the last ten years, community organizers have begun to engage racial justice explicitly. In the next phase, the field needs resources to move an agenda that goes beyond reversing policies with a disproportionate impact on people of color to proactive solutions that expand access to rights and resources. These include time and space to strategize, access to new technologies, communications capacity and leadership development tools.

— Rinku Sen, Applied Research Center

traditional organizing networks that were previously ideologically wed to race-neutral approaches are now addressing race and racism more explicitly in many arenas.

In the civic participation world, there is greater attention to the value of Integrated Voter Engagement and the growing body of work that is connecting community organizing, voter engagement, public education and policy year-round, not simply parachuting in with Get Out the Vote efforts every two or four years.

Nationally, the conversation on race has also been changing rapidly, becoming more complex and engaging expanding audiences in many arenas. There is a spreading awareness and understanding of structural racism and racialization, with many of those working within community change sectors distinguishing between individual, intentional discrimination and cumulative effects of inequities long built into systems regardless of current intent. A few, but increasing numbers of foundations have recognized the value in supporting racial

be absorbed without significant movement. This ability to change without transformation is even more extreme in cases dealing with race. Backlash can be severe, as evident by the vitriolic attacks against President Obama, allowing blatantly racist language to be used as if it were simply a political stance, and by the divides in racial perceptions concerning incidents such as the killing of unarmed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin.

We also recognize with changes in so many of these directions, this is a moment to check what those working most closely with communities are experiencing, what they are seeing as their challenges and opportunities and importantly for the focus of PRE's work, where and how foundation resources can be more effectively supporting their evolving work. Vast changes breed both momentum and urgency, especially at the intersection of race and organizing. Sharing the successes and challenges experienced by a variety of community organizations not only opens a dialogue, but in some cases provides a floor plan for new strategies.

To start the conversation directly with community organizers, we invited a number of key activists to participate in a daylong discussion in December 2011 to explore the intersections of work on structural racism, community organizing and civic participation.

The day began with a brief opening by PRE Advisory Board Member John Powell, who suggested the concept of “structural racialization” as opposed to “structural racism” to help provide a clarifying frame around terminology and concepts, particularly conveying “racialization” as a process rather than an act or belief. With vigorous discussion of Powell’s framing definitions, participants then shared a broad range of challenges and possibilities, prompted by questions around how their community organizing efforts interpreted and incorporated a structural racism or racialization lens, what new ways understanding of structural racism altered their methods of engaging in networks and what they had found more or sometimes less helpful in terms of foundation support or involvement in their organizing efforts.

We hope that the following highlights from the meeting, along with some additional observations raised by some of PRE’s board members, help jump start your own thinking and discussions about this moment and what supports are needed to strengthen the integration of racial justice, community organizing and civic participation to improve outcomes for all.

Lori Villarosa is the executive director of Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE), a multiyear initiative intended to increase the amount and effectiveness of resources aimed at combating institutional and structural racism in communities through capacity building, education and convening of grantmakers and grantseekers. For further information about PRE, including links to many related resources and organizations, please visit our website www.racialequity.org

Building a Home for Tomorrow: Racial Justice Infrastructure as if We Believed It Were Possible

What might racial justice look like? What will it take to achieve it? We would have to transform policies, people, and culture – as well as the systems of authority that play synergistically between them. We would have to change the basic rules of governance from the Electoral College to the Senate, to voter suppression laws and more; all of which operate to maintain white privilege and marginalize communities of color. We would need to amplify alternative narratives and cultural frames in mass media, school books and popular culture that advance the basic notion that all people deserve respect and a life of dignity and agency. In short, our work must operate in at least these two spheres - building better, more powerful movements and transforming the environment in which we live.

We can set concrete benchmarks for building organizing infrastructure in key regions like the South and Southwest by increasing the number of paid, well trained organizers, strengthening intermediary organizations and regional alliances, and investing in communications capacity and independent media networks. We can embrace long-term strategic communications efforts to advance racial justice frames understanding that many of these ideas will take years to take hold so we might as well get it started. And we can make measurable changes in the systems that help us make meaning of the world around us – schools, faith institutions, workplaces and more – with changes in curriculum, pedagogy, training and organizational culture that helps us value the history and humanity of all people and better understand the past that makes this unjust present. If we would make these investments with an eye toward building long-term capacity for change as if we believed change was truly possible, we would lay the foundations for the tomorrow of which our best dreams are made.

Bold, courageous, inspired investments in racial justice will be a game changer for every issue on the progressive agenda because – try as we may – we can’t have real justice without broad based community organizing and engagement – and we can’t have broad, equitable engagement without racial justice. Ensuring transparent, just and equitable systems of engagement are essential elements of democratic architecture for a world that truly works for everyone.

– Makani Themba, Executive Director, The Praxis Project
Excerpted from www.thepraxisproject.org blog.

Dialogue Highlights

Understanding structural racism

I say structural “racialization” because I don’t think it’s racism as we understand it. Race is important and it’s important to understand the role of race in terms of creating structures and impacting structures, but it’s not the intentional racism most people think of on an individual level... An analysis of structural racialization does not mean that we use the phrase. Although an analysis should inform our communication, there is a critical difference between the two...

From my perspective, when you really understand how structures and systems create racialized outcomes—it makes us not less responsible, but more responsible. I’m not saying to let individuals off the hook, but we have to make sure we pay attention to structures and systems.

*—John Powell, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity**

Without knowing the ideas and action coming out of local communities, we lack the collective experience needed to inform our analysis of structural racism, as well as the compass to guide our strategy. Like contending with globalization or the Internet, if we start from the belief that grassroots communities can’t have a say in the future then we’ve lost before we’ve even begun.

—Julie Quiroz-Martínez, Movement Strategy Center

To deal with structural racism, you must do anti-racism organizing, which is more than using specific skills and tools. It is about bringing your humanity into organizing. You do need skills and tools to deal with structural racism, but humanity is the lubricant to make progress in addressing structural racism... For funders, it is important to understand first, that racism is not just another issue — it is infused in all issues. Second, foundations need to realize that understanding racism and racial justice work would actually make their grantmaking more cost effective, with more impact for their money.

—Ron Chisom, People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond

Seeing organizing issues through a structural racism lens

I can think of a lot of well-intended policies that have had a terrible impact on our communities. Maybe the situation shifted or the opposition came up with a new way to invoke more structural racism from a different angle. Sometimes folks get too wedded to the thing that we thought was the right thing.

—Jackie Byers, Black Organizing Project, Center for Third World Organizing

A fight against police brutality can’t be only about the fact that yesterday someone got shot in the neighborhood. There is a history and a structure that supports it. Therefore we must have a huge investment to include political education to contextualize what’s happening. That work is so critical, especially in racial justice work, and, unfortunately, so many organizations don’t have the skill base, resources or time to commit to that.

—Denise Pery, BOLD: Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity, Center for Third World Organizing

We’ve been able to move forward in spite of tremendous losses, in part because we understand the issue of immigration and racism as fundamentally workers’ rights issues, a means for those in power to create a pool of more vulnerable workers. There’s greater awareness of our linked struggles.

—Christine Neumann-Ortiz, Voces de la Frontera

We were called “Students United for Immigrant Rights” and “Students United in the Struggle”. Eventually joining clubs, we became “Youth Empowered in the Struggle,” mainly because in the struggle to get Martin Luther King, Jr. Day activities in schools, African-American students heard the stories that our undocumented students presented, how they needed to unify and needed everyone’s help to push forward the struggle that directly affected people of color.

—Kennia Coronado, Voces de la Frontera Student Leader

Our fight for citizenship has to be a fight for first-class citizenship. And not just for immigrants but all communities of color. Otherwise, immigrants will win no more than a path to second-class citizenship. They'll join poor African American communities in jobs for poverty wages that they now work legally – but can only access through temp agencies and jails.

–Saket Soni, New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice and National Guestworker Alliance

What does a former coal miner fighting mountain top removal have in common with a worker on the Gulf Coast fighting environmental degradation, or both of them have in common with a lesbian working for fairness in housing and employment? What strategies can they learn from each other—and what's that deeper race analysis for all of them? There are models out there we can learn from that we often don't know about, even though there are so many communication tools to connect us.

–Pam McMichael, Highlander Center

Framing and messaging using a structural racism lens

How do we communicate a different message? The theoretical discussion of structural racism is great, but in the policy/political world there's an intersection that we're missing – not only in the Black and Brown and Asian American communities, but it's also within the White community that we're missing that intersection. How do we organize in a way that Whites can see their shared economic interests?

– Derrick Johnson, One Voice and Mississippi NAACP

We don't offer a meta-narrative about how the world works – we carve out small messages - we're afraid to talk about race or gender or sexuality because we're afraid to lose someone.

–Jon Liss, Virginia New Majority

Often times we miss moments to challenge the cultural conversation and we instantly go to policy. And I think that's where we lose. We can't have conversations outside of culture and where people are getting their information every day. We have to challenge that and hold those structures accountable the same way we want to hold elected officials accountable.

–Rashad Robinson, Colorofchange.org

Addressing structural racism from a community organizing perspective often means making campaigns bigger, making targets higher up in the political food chain, and making sure our policy solutions address structures that are enmeshed and entwined. Frankly, it's a lot easier to look at one aspect of the push-out rate for students of color than to look at the interlocking systems of teacher preparation and placement, school discipline policies, NCLB policy at the federal level, and tax revenue.

This kind of work takes much more significant coalition and movement building work, work that is often about finding the overlapping interests of multiple communities that are pitted against one another for resources. It also takes research and support from outside organizations, but the right ones who understand community organizing and coalition building work, as well as data. There's an inherent tension between a 5-8 year campaign that unravels the interlocking structures that produce disparate outcomes from communities of color, and a 1-2 year funding cycle.

–Kalpana Krishnamurthy, Western States Center

Building constituencies and leaders

Regarding service providers – a lot of people are surprised to hear that they are our most reliable and first constituency. Another constituency that's important that we've tried to be creative around – relative caregivers and to some extent foster parents. They're providing a great service to the State and saving it significant dollars... Those are folks that we organize - to try to get them to think of themselves as workers. You can actually step back and say: "where are Black workers who are under attack and how can they be included in this rubric or not?"

–Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Community Coalition

We can talk about racial justice issues every day, but going back into the real world we can't talk about it like this. We have to take it step-by-step, inch-by-inch. Part of this is finding the leaders and creating the space to talk about this. The transformation of a leader in this process is the most critical piece.

–Ponsella Hardaway, MOSES

Building multi-racial organizing is something that we have always done. We've done this by building from the base... The redistricting process in Washington State is a great example of multi-racial organizing. By linking the struggles of disenfranchisement and lack of representation for all people of color, we were able to create a true fight that touched all communities and win...

—Ada Williams Prince, OneAmerica

How do we build a more permanent political majority? We're trying to build a common understanding in some ways about how the world should work – around government, taxes, public education, infrastructure... How do you fuse the African-American belt of the state with a multi-national, large immigrant population in Northern VA and pockets of White folks – that's really the formula at the state level and I would argue at similar variations throughout the South – and that's how we create a progressive, anti-racist anchor as opposed to the anchor of white supremacy.

—Jon Liss, Virginia New Majority

One of the most challenging issues we are confronting as we work to expand the Latino electorate across the country is the large number of U.S. citizen Latino adults who have given up on voting. While we project that a record 12.2 million Latinos will vote in November 2012, that is out of 23.5 million who will be eligible to vote. Our emerging research on this segment of the Latino Community, "The Great Unengaged," is suggesting that many of them believe that our political system does not affect their lives and their vote does not matter.

—Arturo Vargas, NALEO Education Fund

Alliances, coalitions and infrastructure to address structural racism

We made a decision to convene ourselves on our own terms versus being convened by funders or other intermediaries. We were not interested in theorizing about alliance building, but rather to be in an active ongoing practice. How do we have an analysis—a very clear and strong analysis that's behind the work that we're doing—and have a clear vision of what we want? We realized that if we didn't create spaces across movements and across sectors, we can't articulate what we want, and then we're stuck in defensive fights.

—Saritha Gupta, Jobs with Justice

There's extraordinary new architecture in the last few years in the progressive sector that gets us beyond the challenges of local vs. national in very clear ways... I think what we need to figure out is how to maximize the new progressive infrastructure that we've all built so that networks that exist can be capillary tubes for the kind of capacity you're talking about [to address broader structural issues].

—Saket Soni, New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice and National Guestworker Alliance

Where is the space to say "alliance building for what?" like we used to say, "organizing for what?" When is it not a strategic alliance? When is it not a real alliance? What resources are actually being put into it? Though I'm completely enthusiastic about the things that we've said, nonetheless I'm always nervous – let's not generate a new orthodoxy still within a place where we don't dare criticize each other because foundations will be listening and I'm going to cause you to lose your funding.

—Richard Healey, Grassroots Policy Project

Over the last several years, especially since the election of Barack Obama, electoral strategies have begun to have significant influence in community organizing, civic participation, and movement building. While these strategies have reshaped organizers' sense of scale and impact, the electoral arena and the data that drives it also has a very different meaning for racial justice organizing. The central importance of voter eligibility, voter demographics, and propensity to vote can put a different value on the agents of change, and how to win.

Racial justice organizers have begun to make an impact by increasing the voting registration and mobilization of racially marginalized communities. But, a key question is how to maintain our traditional agents of change: racially, socially, and economically marginalized constituencies, at the center of the change strategy when social and voter exclusion is on the rise, and while elections are still about winning in present cycles.

For funders, there is still too often segregation between civic engagement funding for voter strategies and the support of social movements that should drive them, often leaving our central heroes out of the mix of political change strategies.

—Gihan Perera, Florida New Majority

A growing number of community problem solvers are recognizing the necessity of embedding racial equity principles and practices into their work. The most groundbreaking efforts include coalitions of school systems, police departments, non-profit organizations, and informal community leaders, and lift up the voices of those most affected by structural racism. The coalitions are hungry for intermediaries and funders whose supports are guided by an explicit racial equity lens. Only then can funding and tools yield authentic relationships, community engagement, democratic practice, and systemic change.

– Martha McCoy, The Paul J. Aicher Foundation/Everyday Democracy

Challenges with funding and funders

Normally we get a call twice a month from a huge organization from outside the region that got a major grant and they want to partner with us. If you project five years out, the funder will say “We put all this money into your state and we haven’t gotten anything from it.” A better way to do it is anchor the relationship with a group on the ground, then let the group contract out. Post-Hurricane Katrina funding was a great example of foundations setting up groups to fail: give a three- to five-year commitment, and then shift focus. Now so many of those organizations led by people of color that didn’t get the direct support are closing their doors.

–Derrick Johnson, One Voice and Mississippi NAACP

Program officers don’t just want to give money away, they want to be players, political actors. And it’s not just the affinity groups, there are more and more people doing things together, forming teams, becoming political operatives and doing actions. It changes the terrain for us, and it’s invisible to us unless we get an invitation to present or you sit on a foundation board... Is there a way that we can engage them more, to have them be more transparent about what they’re doing?

–Richard Healey, Grassroots Policy Project

We win when visionary campaigns are vehicles for courageous directly affected people to imagine leading all of society. When funders fund our ability to create social momentum AND policy change – we win. But when communities are funded only to mobilize, we create enough social momentum to define the problem – but not enough to define the solution. Funders should fund the movement organizations with grassroots bases to hire the policy intermediaries and research shops. That way, directly affected people can describe the problem – and define the solution.

–Saket Soni, New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice and National Guestworker Alliance

Participants: Meeting on Community Organizing, Civic Participation & Racial Justice

Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity December 2011, Washington, DC

- ▲ Jackie Byers, Black Organizing Project, Center for Third World Organizing
- ▲ Rick Cohen, PRE Consultant
- ▲ Kennia Coronado, Voces de la Frontera Student Leader
- ▲ Sarita Gupta, Jobs with Justice
- ▲ Ponsella Hardaway, MOSES
- ▲ Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Community Coalition
- ▲ Judy Hatcher, PRE Consultant
- ▲ Richard Healey, Grassroots Policy Project
- ▲ Derrick Johnson, One Voice and Mississippi NAACP
- ▲ Jon Liss, Virginia New Majority
- ▲ Pam McMichael, Highlander Center
- ▲ Christine Neumann-Ortiz, Voces de la Frontera
- ▲ Denise Perry, BOLD: Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity, Center for Third World Organizing
- ▲ Maggie Potapchuk, PRE Consultant
- ▲ John Powell, Kirwan Institute (*at time of meeting, now Haas Diversity Research Center at the Univ. of California, Berkeley)
- ▲ Rashad Robinson, Colorofchange.org
- ▲ Saket Soni, New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice and National Guestworker Alliance
- ▲ Ada Williams Prince, OneAmerica
- ▲ Lori Villarosa, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity
- ▲ Bob Wing, PushBack Network (via phone)

PRE Advisory Board

- ▲ Ron Chisom, The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond
- ▲ Richard Healey, Grassroots Policy Project
- ▲ Kalpana Krishnamurthy, RACE Program, Western States Center
- ▲ Keith Lawrence, Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change
- ▲ Kien Lee, Community Science
- ▲ Martha McCoy, The Paul J. Aicher Foundation/Everyday Democracy
- ▲ Gihan Perera, Florida New Majority
- ▲ John A. Powell, Haas Diversity Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley
- ▲ Julie Quiroz-Martínez, Movement Strategy Center
- ▲ Rinku Sen, Applied Research Center/ColorLines Magazine
- ▲ Makani Themba, The Praxis Project
- ▲ Arturo Vargas, National Association of Latino Elected Officials Education Fund
- ▲ Maya Wiley, Center for Social Inclusion

Critical Issues Forum, Volume 4

To deepen exploration of these issues and inform the discourse that we hope will continue in the racial justice, community organizing and civic participation communities, PRE's next Critical Issues Forum will feature articles by advocates and activists reflecting on the current context, sharing promising practices and raising questions to consider in our next stages of work, including:

Julie Quiroz-Martínez, Movement Strategy Center

This article argues that addressing structural racism requires an understanding of the history of organizing in communities of color, as well as on-going consideration of trends, innovations and questions within community organizing.

Makani Themba, The Praxis Project

Themba's article examines the relationship between strategic communications and racial justice, asserting that some big-ticket communications approaches undermine racial justice efforts (and therefore, progressive work generally) while fundamentally ignoring a growing body of evidence on effective communications practice.

DeAngelo Bester, Workers Center for Racial Justice and Valery Jean, Families United for Racial and Economic Equality

This article will discuss how to reinvigorate grassroots organizing in Black communities across the country; how Black organizing will help strengthen and advance a comprehensive agenda for racial equity, and how this will help to shift the country toward more progressive politics.

Denise Perry, BOLD – Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity

Perry will discuss the impacts of organizations that integrate a cultural lens and address how philanthropy can best support those efforts. Recognizing how the pressures of structural racism impacts have shaped our communities; finding new shapes for success will need a new expertise to create a full spectrum of cultural power.

Aparna Shah and Mari Ryono, Mobilize the Immigrant Vote

There is much talk of the Latino and immigrant vote, including diverse Asian, African, and Arab communities. This article will consider the short- and long-term strategies to move these voters to support racial justice policies and ensure that the immigrant vote is a racial justice vote.

Terry Keleher, Applied Research Center

If community organizing efforts to address structural racism and philanthropic efforts to support them are to flourish and succeed, we need an effective and expanded mechanism for developing racial justice leaders and organizations. This article will address the training, tools, skills and supports that can help communities advance equitable strategies and solutions.

South by Southwest Experiment: Mónica Córdova, SouthWest Organizing Project; Leroy Johnson, Southern Echo; Genaro Rendon-Lopez, SW Workers Union; and Louis Head, South by Southwest Experiment

The co-principals of the South by Southwest Experiment will address strategies used to give the "New Majority" real power and meaning through collective work on Census, fairly apportioned electoral districts; accountable community governance; youth leadership development and strengthening the intergenerational character of their work.

Ronald White, Building Utopia Consulting

This article will share the perspectives of a number of funders working at the intersections of community organizing, civic participation and structural racism. It will consider challenges and opportunities, where they have seen more or less movement within their institutions and with grantees, and the next questions to consider in strengthening such work.

Lori Villarosa, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE)

Villarosa will report on interviews between key national thinkers from different vantage points, as they share observations and perspectives on how to strengthen community organizing and participation using a structural racism analysis. Pairs will include: **Deepak Bhargava**, Center for Community Change and **John A. Powell**, Haas Diversity Research Center, University of California, Berkeley; **Marquee Harris-Dawson**, Community Coalition and **Manuel Pastor**, University of Southern California's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity and its Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration; **Maya Wiley**, Center for Social Inclusion and **Ai-Jen Poo**, National Domestic Workers Alliance.

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